DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 380 846 CS 508 867

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TITLE Student Perceptions of Instructors' Affinity-Seeking Behavior and Classroom Climate: How They See What We Do.
PUB DATE Nov 94
NOTE 27p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (80th, New Orleans, LA, November 19-22, 1994).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Communication; Higher Education; *Introductory Courses; *Speech Communication; Teacher Student Relationship; *Teaching Methods; *Teaching Styles; Trust (Psychology)
IDENTIFIERS *Affinity Seeking Strategies; *Student Perceptions of Teacher

ABSTRACT

A study explored student perceptions of how instructors of the speech communication basic course utilize affinity-seeking strategies to establish a communication climate in the classroom. Subjects were 147 undergraduate students enrolled in the basic course at a large midwestern university. Each subject was asked to complete two instruments: (1) the affinity-seeking strategy scale modified by J. C. McCroskey and L. L. McCroskey (1986); and (2) the Communication Climate Questionnaire (E. R. Hays 1970). Results indicated that a significant relationship exists between the perceived use of affinity-seeking strategies and the establishment of classroom communication climate. Students who perceived a positive communication climate reported a more frequent use of affinity-seeking strategies by their instructors. It was discovered that basic course instructors utilize 19 of the 25 affinity-seeking strategies, but rarely use the strategies of concede control, inclusion of others, influence perceptions of closeness, openness, reward association, and self-inclusion. Trustworthiness emerged as the most significant predictor of classroom climate. This indicates, perhaps, that teacher credibility is an important factor in student perceptions of the formation of classroom climate. Students who trust their instructors are invariably more likely to perceive other positive attributes as well. (Contains 33 references and three tables of data.) (Author/TB)

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ED 380 846

Student Perceptions of Instructors' Affinity-Seeking Behavior and Classroom Climate: How They See What We Do

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A paper presented at the 1994 meeting of the
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Abstract

Student Perceptions of Instructors' Affinity-Seeking Behavior and Classroom Climate: How They See What We Do

This study explored student perceptions of how basic course instructors utilize affinity-seeking strategies to establish a communication climate in the classroom. Subjects were 147 undergraduate students enrolled in the basic course at a large midwestern university. Each subject was asked to complete two instruments: (a) the affinity-seeking strategy scale modified by McCroskey and McCroskey (1986) and (b) the Communication Climate Questionnaire (Hays, 1970). Results indicate that a significant relationship exists between the perceived use of affinity-seeking strategies and the establishment of classroom communication climate. It was discovered that basic course instructors utilize 19 of the 25 affinity-seeking strategies, but rarely use the strategies of concede control, inclusion of others, influence perceptions of closeness, openness, reward association, and self-inclusion.

Student Perceptions of Instructors' Affinity-Seeking Behavior and Classroom Climate: How They See What We Do

The classroom context is filled with a large number of communication variables which affect the establishment of the classroom climate. Research has illustrated that the various communication behaviors of both the teacher and the student profoundly affects classroom dynamics (e.g., Richmond, 1990). This study focused on the relationship between affinity-seeking and classroom communication climate. Specifically, this study explored student perceptions of how basic course instructors utilize affinity-seeking strategies to establish a communication climate in the classroom. To gain a better understanding of this relationship, it is necessary to examine two areas of literature: (a) affinity-seeking and (b) classroom climate.

Affinity-seeking

Affinity-seeking is defined as "the process by which individuals attempt to get other people to like and to feel positive toward them" (Bell & Daly, 1984, p. 111). Bell and Daly (1984) developed a typology of 25 affinity-seeking strategies that people employ to gain the social approval of others. For a description of the typology, see Bell and Daly (1984), Frymier and Thompson (1992), or McCroskey and McCroskey (1986). Previous research has examined affinity-seeking behavior in initial interactions (Martin, 1992); collegiate relationships (Richmond, Gorham, & Furio, 1987); marital relationships (Bell, Daly, &

Gonzalez, 1987); friendships (Bell, Tremblay, & Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1987); and developing relationships (Tolhuizen, 1989). Other research has explored the link between affinity-seeking, self-disclosure, and self-awareness (Rubin, Rubin, & Martin, 1993) and the use of affinity-seeking strategies by politicians (Mitchell, 1994).

Affinity-seeking has received a great deal of attention in its use in the classroom. In the instructional context, the use of affinity-seeking strategies has been explored from both the perspectives of the teacher and the student. McCroskey and McCroskey (1986) asked 311 elementary and secondary school teachers about the types and frequency of affinity-seeking strategies used by other teachers. They found that over 90% of the teachers had observed the use of eight strategies in the classroom: physical attractiveness, sensitivity, elicit other's disclosure, trustworthiness, nonverbal immediacy, conversational rule-keeping, dynamism, and listening. Conversely, teachers observed little use of nine strategies: inclusion of others, self-inclusion, reward association, concede control, influence perceptions of closeness, similarity, openness, present interesting self, and supportiveness. McCroskey and McCroskey (1986) concluded that status of the teacher may have an effect on the use of affinity-seeking strategies. In the classroom, the use of a particular strategy may or may not be appropriate for the teacher-student relationship.

Gorham, Kelley, and McCroskey (1989) examined the affinity-seeking strategies used by 229 elementary and secondary school teachers and their efforts to get students to like them. As the grade levels of the teachers increased, the use of four affinity-seeking strategies increased as well: trustworthiness, sensitivity, self-inclusion, and elicit other's disclosure. Three strategies--facilitate enjoyment, nonverbal immediacy, and self-concept confirmation--were used more frequently at lower grade levels. Overall, the facilitate enjoyment strategy was most frequently used. Gorham et al. (1989) suggested, however, that affinity-strategy usage is dependent upon whether the strategy is utilized to gain liking of the teacher or to gain liking of the subject matter.

Frymier and Thompson (1992) approached affinity-seeking from the student perspective. They found that a teacher's perceived use of affinity-seeking strategies is correlated with perceived teacher credibility and student motivation. Specifically, twelve strategies accounted for the correlations: listening, facilitate enjoyment, dynamism, elicit other's disclosure, optimism, sensitivity, conversational rule-keeping, comfortable self, nonverbal immediacy, altruism, present interesting self, and trustworthiness. Strategies such as reward association, self-inclusion, and similarity were not related to credibility and motivation. Similarly, Richmond (1990) discovered that five strategies affect a student's motivation to study: facilitate

enjoyment, assume equality, nonverbal immediacy, optimism, and self-concept confirmation.

Moreover, it has been established that a link exists between the use of affinity-seeking strategies and student learning. Richmond (1990) and Roach (1991) found that a teacher's use of affinity-seeking strategies positively affects a student's perceived level of affective and cognitive learning. And in general, students like teachers who use affinity-seeking behaviors (Roach, 1991).

The relationship between affinity-seeking and teacher competence has been studied by Prisbell (1993). He found that five strategies account most for perceived teacher competence: trustworthiness, assume equality, personal autonomy, altruism, and listening. Prisbell recommended that the use of some strategies be avoided, such as reward association, similarity, self-inclusion, present interesting self, and influence perceptions of others. In any case, teachers will be perceived as more competent if they engage in specific affinity-seeking strategy usage (Prisbell, 1993).

It appears, then, that the use of affinity-seeking strategies has a positive effect in the classroom. Whether reported by teachers or students, affinity-seeking is related to instructional factors such as teacher credibility, teacher competence, and student learning. However, it is the interaction between student, teacher, and setting that contributes significantly to behavioral variance in the classroom (Trickett &

Moos, 1973). To advance the study of affinity-seeking, it is necessary to examine the influence of classroom climate.

Classroom climate

Darling and Civikly (1987) stated that the communication climate of a classroom is determined by the needs of both the teacher and the student. For the teacher, a communication climate may be affected by the need to establish control, credibility, and/or esteem. For the student, a communication climate may be affected by the need to establish and defend personal worth and social stability in the eyes of both teachers and peers. Thus, these dichotomous needs will impact the communication climate of any classroom.

According to Rosenfeld (1983), communication climate is established through the social and psychological contexts of any relationship. The literature on classroom communication suggests that climate may be dependent on three factors: (a) the use of supportive and defensive behaviors, (b) the components of the classroom structure, and (c) the use of confirming and disconfirming responses. Taken together, these factors create patterns of classroom behavior that may or may not establish a supportive climate. In addition, other factors have been found to influence climate.

Supportive/defensive behaviors. A supportive communication climate is efficient and is characterized as consisting of few distortions, effective listening behaviors, and clear message transmission (Darling & Civikly, 1987). A defensive climate, on

the other hand, "interferes with communication and thus makes it difficult--and sometimes impossible--for anyone to convey ideas clearly and to move effectively toward the solution of . . . problems" (Gibb, 1961, p. 148).

Gibb (1961) developed six categories of behaviors which he believed were characteristic of supportive and defensive behaviors. Originally developed as small group behaviors, these categories are applicable in the classroom as well. Gibb labeled these behaviors as description-evaluation, problem orientation-control, spontaneity-strategy, empathy- neutrality, equality-superiority, and provisionalism-certainty. A supportive communicate climate is characterized by the first behavior in each group while the use of the second behavior reflects a defensive climate. A supportive communication climate reduces defensiveness and allows students to concentrate fully upon the content and structure of the message (Gibb, 1961).

Rosenfeld (1983) found that the communication climate of a college classroom may be characterized by an underlying level of defensiveness. He examined how liked and disliked classes are distinguished by their levels of supportiveness and defensiveness. Specifically, Rosenfeld found that: (a) supportiveness is more important than defensiveness in assessing climate, (b) liked classes generally have more supportive than defensive behaviors, (c) liked classes may be characterized by teacher behaviors that are classified as supportive, and (d) disliked classes cause students to develop coping mechanisms

(i.e., forming alliances against the teacher, not doing what the teacher asks). Moreover, Rosenfeld and Jarrard (1985) discovered in liked classes, students perceive themselves as important and valued, and work toward establishing a "coworker" relationship with the professor.

Classroom factors. Researchers have identified three variables that affect the communication climate of a classroom: (a) student sex, (b) class participation, and (c) subject matter interest. It has been established that female students do not participate as much as male students in the college classroom (Crawford & MacLeod, 1990; Hall & Sandler, 1982; Pearson & West, 1991). Female students often ask fewer questions in class and are less assertive than males in doing so (Pearson & West, 1991).

Class participation is also a factor. Constantinople, Cornelius, and Gray (1988) and Crawford and MacLeod (1990) determined that a smaller number of students enrolled in a class results in increased class participation. Merkel (1993) reported an inverse relationship between class size and the opportunity to communicate, teacher use of verbal immediacy strategies, and teacher use of nonverbal immediacy strategies. Myers (1994) found that a highly-scripted daily routine, the interaction patterns among the students, and the general communication behaviors of the teacher resulted in a supportive communication climate. However, Karp and Yoels (1976) argued that most students opt for non-involvement in the classroom; therefore, student participation becomes dependent upon the organizational

features of the classroom (i.e., course syllabus), and is not indicative of classroom climate.

DeYoung (1977) proposed that a higher level of interest in the classroom content (as indicated through attendance records) is a reflection of a more positive climate. Heller, Puff, and Mills (1985) found that time may be the prevailing factor in classroom participation. Over time, students are asked to lead more discussion, are given more time to answer questions, are called more often by name, and are recognized more when volunteering in class.

Confirming and disconfirming responses. Sieburg (1974) stated that the use of confirming and disconfirming behaviors affect the values individuals place on the self and on others. A confirming response expresses a caring attitude (Rosenfeld, 1983) and implies that the other individual is a valuable person (Rosenfeld & Jarrard, 1985). A disconfirming message fails to acknowledge the other person as being a vital part of the communication process and is expressed in an uncaring manner (Rosenfeld, 1983).

Rationale

It has been established that affinity-seeking is one technique that further aids the development of the student-teacher relationship in the classroom (Frymier & Thompson, 1992; McCroskey & McCroskey, 1986; Prisbell, 1993; Richmond, 1990). However, the relationship between teacher affinity-seeking behavior and classroom climate is unknown. If the assumption

can be made that the teacher constructs the climate, then it would make sense that the use of affinity-seeking be included as a tool used to construct the climate. To explore the relationship between affinity-seeking and classroom climate, the following hypothesis and research questions are posited:

H: There is a significant relationship between affinity-seeking and classroom climate.

RQ1: Which affinity-seeking strategies do students report being used by their basic course instructors?

RQ2: Which affinity-seeking strategies account most for the variance in the establishment of classroom climate?

Gender is one factor that needs further exploration. Research has illustrated that male and female students perceive differences in the use of affinity-seeking in various relationships (Bell & Daly, 1984; Richmond et al., 1987; Tolhuizen, 1989), but the differences have not emerged in the instructional setting (Roach, 1991). In addition, since student gender (Constantinople et al., 1988; Hall & Sandler, 1982) affects the construction of classroom climate, the following research question is proposed:

RQ3: Is there a significant difference between male and female students perceptions of teacher use of affinity-seeking strategies and teacher establishment of classroom communication climate?

Methodology

Subjects

Subjects were undergraduate students enrolled in the basic communication course at a large midwestern university. All subjects received a research point necessary for the successful completion of the course.

A total of 147 students participated in the study, which included 78 males and 69 females. The age of the participants ranged from 18 years to 47 years (M = 20.9, SD = 4.11; Mo = 19, Md = 20). The majority of participants reported their class standing at either the freshman or sophomore level (n = 57 each, a total of 114). Twenty-six (n = 26) respondents were juniors and seven respondents (n = 7) were seniors.

Instruments

Each subject was asked to complete two instruments: (a) the affinity-seeking strategy scale modified by McCroskey and McCroskey (1986) and (b) the Communication Climate Questionnaire (Hays, 1970).

Affinity-seeking strategy scale. The affinity-seeking strategy scale is a 25-item questionnaire that asks each respondent to rate how often, if ever, a particular affinity-seeking strategy is used. Originally developed by Bell and Daly (1984), the scale was adapted by McCroskey and McCroskey (1986) for use in the instructional setting.

Participants were provided with descriptions of each of the 25 affinity-seeking strategies (i.e., "my teacher acts comfortable and relaxed in the classroom"). For each strategy, the student was asked to: (a) indicate if the teacher uses the

strategy and (b) if so, how often. Responses were points on a 5 point Likert-type scale ranging from very often (4) to never (0).

Reliability of the scale has ranged from .87 to .90 (Frymier & Thompson, 1992; Prisbell, 1993; Richmond, 1990). In this study, coefficient alpha was reported at .88.

Classroom climate. The Classroom Climate Questionnaire (CCQ) is a 17-item scale that asks each respondent to rate the supportive and defensive behaviors that a teacher may use (i. e., "my teacher helps me understand the reasons for his opinions"). Eight items are supportive behaviors and nine items are defensive behaviors. Responses were points on a 5 point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1).

The CCQ has been used by a number of researchers (Darling & Civikly, 1987; Hays, 1970; Rosenfeld, 1983; Rosenfeld & Jarrard, 1985), who have confirmed its reliability and validity as a measurement tool. In this study, coefficient alpha was reported at .52.

Procedures

Subjects were asked to complete the two questionnaires during the thirteenth week of the course semester. Unlike previous research which asked students to complete the instrument in reference to the most recent class attended (Frymier & Thompson, 1992; Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1986; Prisbell, 1993; Richmond, 1990), students were asked to complete the instrument in reference to their basic course instructor.

Statistical analysis

The hypothesis was tested using a Pearson Product-Moment correlation between the summed scores of the affinity-seeking strategy scale and the summed scores of the CCQ. Research question one was answered through an assessment of the frequencies of each strategy. High use of a strategy was defined by a mean score of 2.5 or higher, and low use of a strategy was defined by a mean score of 1.5 or lower (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1986).

Research question two was answered using stepwise multiple regression analysis. Each affinity-seeking strategy served as a predictor variable and the summed climate score served as the criterion variable. In addition, correlational data between each of the 25 strategies and the composite climate score were obtained. Research question three was answered using t-tests. A t-test examined the differences of perceptions of affinity-seeking strategy usage and perceptions of classroom climate between male and female subjects.

Results

This study explored student perceptions of how basic course instructors utilize affinity-seeking strategies to establish a communication climate in the classroom.

The hypothesis was supported ($r = .45$, $p < .01$). A significant relationship exists between the perceived use of affinity-seeking strategies and the establishment of classroom communication climate.

The first research question indicates that basic course instructors utilize a variety of affinity-seeking strategies (see Table 1). These include altruism, assume control, assume equality, comfortable self, conversational rule-keeping, dynamism, elicit other's disclosure, facilitate enjoyment, listening, nonverbal immediacy, optimism, personal autonomy, physical attractiveness, presenting interesting self, self-concept confirmation, sensitivity, similarity, supportiveness, and trustworthiness. Strategies not used or rarely used include concede control, inclusion of others, influence perceptions of closeness, openness, reward association, and self-inclusion.

The second research question inquired about the particular affinity-seeking strategies that had an effect upon classroom climate. Stepwise multiple regression analysis revealed that six affinity-seeking strategies contributed significantly to the establishment of classroom climate and accounted for 47% of the variance. These strategies are trustworthiness, influence perceptions of closeness, present interesting self, altruism, reward association, and assume equality (see Table 2). The summed affinity-seeking scale was correlated with classroom climate ($F = 30.10$, $df = 1/145$, $p<.001$) and accounted for 17% of the variance. Nineteen of the 25 strategies were significantly correlated with classroom climate (see Table 3).

The third research question explored whether men and women perceive affinity-seeking and classroom climate differently. There was no significant difference between male and female

students' perceptions for either teacher use of affinity-seeking strategies (t = 1.15, df = 145, p = .252) or teacher establishment of classroom climate (t = .15, df = 145, p = .883).

Discussion

In this study, a significant relationship was found to exist between the perceived use of affinity-seeking strategies and the establishment of communication climate. Students who perceived a positive communication climate reported a more frequent use of affinity-seeking strategies by their instructors. A post-hoc analysis of the relationship found that a significant relationship exists between affinity-seeking and a supportive climate (r = .58, p <.01). This finding supports Rosenfeld's (1983) contention that supportiveness is more important than defensiveness in communication climate assessment.

Previous research has established that grade level and subject matter affects a teacher's use of affinity-seeking strategies (Gorham et al., 1989). In this study, basic course instructors were perceived to use, with regularity, 19 of the 25 affinity-seeking strategies. This finding is generally consistent with the results reported by Frymier and Thompson (1992). The six strategies reported as not being used--concede control, inclusion of others, influence perceptions of closeness, openness, reward association, and self-inclusion--is a finding also consistent with other studies. Elementary and secondary school teachers reported that teachers did not use these six strategies (McCroskey and McCroskey, 1986). Frymier and Thompson

(1992) found that reward association and self-inclusion are not related to teacher credibility or student motivation. Prisbell (1993) stated that reward association, self-inclusion, and influence perceptions of closeness are not strategies used to promote teacher competence. Thus, while a variety of affinity-seeking strategies are reported as being used by teachers in the classroom, there is consensus that certain affinity-seeking strategies are not effective for use in the classroom.

Trustworthiness emerged as the most significant predictor of classroom climate. The prevalent use of this strategy has been noted by other researchers as well (Frymier & Thompson, 1992; Gorham et al., 1989; McCroskey & McCroskey, 1986; Prisbell, 1993; Roach, 1991). This indicates, perhaps, that teacher credibility is an important factor in student perceptions of the formation of classroom climate. Students who trust their instructors are invariably more likely to perceive other positive attributes as well.

It was also discovered that gender did not appear to affect the perceptions of either affinity-seeking or classroom climate. Moreover, Roach (1991) concluded that male and female instructors do not differ in their use of affinity-seeking strategies. Student perceptions of the classroom, then, may be affected by the teacher role and teacher behavior rather than teacher sex or student sex (Jordan, McGreal, & Wheeless, 1990).

Because previous research has examined the teacher perspective and the student perspective separately, future

directions for research should include an examination of affinity-seeking strategy usage using the same pool of teachers and students. Doing so might reflect a more accurate picture of affinity-seeking use. "If affinity is indeed important in classroom contexts, then it behooves investigators to . . . demonstrate, behaviorally, the important relationships" (Daly & Kreiser, 1993, pp. 141-142).

Classroom climate research must focus upon the definition of climate as a construct. For example, Myers operationally defined climate as "the verbal and nonverbal behaviors used . . . that established the communicative tone for the students in the classroom" (p. 7). Neer and Kircher (1989) defined climate as "participation which occurs as a consequence of interpersonal approval" and the "ability to adapt to the interpersonal context of the class" (p. 73). Merkel, on the other hand, identified selected variables of classroom climate (i.e., opportunity to communicate, communication competence) and studied these variables in isolation.

In any case, the classroom context is filled with a large number of communication variables which affect the establishment of communication climate. The use of affinity-seeking strategies is just one variable. It is no surprise that the use of affinity-seeking strategies influences the perception of classroom climate. However, this perception of climate is undoubtedly influenced by other variables as well, which needs to be identified and studied.

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Table 1

Mean scores of affinity-seeking strategies

		Mean	SD
1.	Altruism	3.03	1.06
2.	Assume Control	2.71	1.37
3.	Assume Equality	2.78	1.34
4.	Comfortable Self	3.62	.89
5.	Concede Control	1.71	1.44
6.	Conversation Rule-Keeping	3.25	1.13
7.	Dynamism	3.29	1.13
8.	Elicit Other's Disclosure	3.38	.92
9.	Facilitate Enjoyment	3.05	1.20
10.	Inclusion of Others	.67	1.31
11.	Influence Perceptions of Closeness	.83	1.37
12.	Listening	3.27	.99
13.	Nonverbal Immediacy	2.51	1.38
14.	Openness	1.38	1.45
15.	Optimism	3.44	.89
16.	Personal Autonomy	3.41	.99
17.	Physical Attractiveness	2.80	1.24
18.	Presenting Interesting Self	2.90	1.34
19.	Reward Association	1.30	1.50
20.	Self-Concept Confirmation	3.34	.96
21.	Self-Inclusion	1.62	1.50
22.	Sensitivity	2.66	1.28
23.	Similarity	2.55	1.22
24.	Supportiveness	3.04	1.04
25.	Trustworthiness	3.23	1.04

Table 2

Summary of stepwise multiple regression analysis

Step/strategy	Mult. R	R^2	Beta	F	prob.
1. Trustworthiness	.52	.27	.24	52.63	.000
2. Closeness	.59	.34	-.23	37.62	.000
3. Interesting Self	.64	.41	.24	33.08	.000
4. Altruism	.66	.43	.16	27.10	.000
5. Reward	.67	.45	-.14	23.09	.000
6. Assume Equality	.68	.47	.15	20.43	.000

Table 3

Correlations between affinity-seeking strategies and climate

Affinity-seeking strategy	Classroom Climate
1. Altruism	.45*
2. Assume Control	.09
3. Assume Equality	.41*
4. Comfortable Self	.37*
5. Concede Control	-.01
6. Conversation Rule-Keeping	.41*
7. Dynamism	.42*
8. Elicit Other's Disclosure	.29*
9. Facilitate Enjoyment	.42*
10. Inclusion of Others	-.15
11. Influence Perceptions of Closeness	-.28*
12. Listening	.40*
13. Nonverbal Immediacy	.13
14. Openness	-.10
15. Optimism	.32*
16. Personal Autonomy	.22*
17. Physical Attractiveness	.22*
18. Presenting Interesting Self	.49*
19. Reward Association	-.16*
20. Self-Concept Confirmation	.43*
21. Self-Inclusion	-.02
22. Sensitivity	.43*
23. Similarity	.21*
24. Supportiveness	.49*
25. Trustworthiness	.52*
Multiple R	.41
R square	.17
F value	30.10
probability	.000

Note. *$p < .01$